Learning Leadership from History: The Gettysburg Experience

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Abstract
This article focuses on a specific methodology for developing leaders—the historical leadership lesson. We will explore what this method's objectives are, how it works, the anecdotal evidence of outcomes and criteria for others to use in formulating their own historical leadership lesson.

For years, leadership development has used a wide variety of techniques and technologies for educating leaders and giving them skills. These methods have evolved from the early 1980s, focusing on case studies and role plays to the latest popular method—Action Learning. Methodological requirements for successful leadership instruction have changed with the generations. This article uses the Battle of Gettysburg as a test case for the historical leadership lesson. While its focus is American, its application is universal. Participants are literally and figuratively transported to a pivotal event in history, the dilemmas of leaders are examined and debated, their decisions dissected... sometimes second-guessed, and corollaries are drawn to current leadership challenges.

We are standing among a group of twenty-five or so business executives on a windy, chilly ridgeline in south central Pennsylvania, facing west. To our right is a road, the Chambersburg Pike. Behind us about a mile is another higher ridge—Seminary Ridge - and on top of that a building with a cupola. In front and directly behind is a gently rolling field and across the field in front is woodland that extends around to our left. We imagine that it is an early morning, July 1, 1863. We also imagine that we see the dust rising from a line of soldiers in gray uniforms coming up the road.

"You are Brigadier General John Buford," says our group leader. "You are in command of a scouting element of the Army of the Potomac. You have 2,000 cavalry and two small artillery batteries. Your orders are to find the location of Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia of 75,000 men that invaded Pennsylvania about a week ago. Now you've found them. Behind the ridge is a crossroads town named Gettysburg. Ten miles to the south, I Corps with 20,000 Union troops are marching north under Major General John Reynolds. That's a good half-day march or more. There are 80,000 additional Union troops coming in from other directions, within a day's march. In front of you are the leading elements of A. P. Hill's corps from North Carolina under General Henry Heth. You and your cavalry are the only Union forces between the rebels and the high ground behind you. Take a look around at the terrain. What do you see? What are your choices? What are your assets and liabilities? What would you do? How do you know your choice will succeed?"

The members of the group look around, sensing the urgency that John Buford must have felt, and they begin to answer. Soon, the discussion becomes lively, with different options being weighed and debated. The facilitator turns the questioning into a dialogue about finding and recognizing opportunities in the corporate world. Each member of the group talks about how opportunities and risk are evaluated in his or her work unit or corporation and how the leader is sometimes the first individual to see an opening for doing something new or different. The facilitator sums up the discussion by threading together the comments and refers back to Buford's decision to hold off the Confederates until Reynolds' divisions came up. "He was a leader who knew how to calculate a risk; he knew holding the ground was worth it.” Heads nod and reflect on the concept of calculated risk. The group breaks up briefly as different members wander across the ground, deep in thought. Then, the group gathers and heads to the next stop on their way around the battlefield at Gettysburg where another incident and another leader's actions will be analyzed and discussed.

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Practitioners of leadership development have been designing new methods for learning both hard and soft skills since the surge in corporate management training in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Since then, the classic model for management training has been the case study-driven workshop, emulating the format used in business schools. Since much of corporate-based management training encompasses interpersonal effectiveness, there are inevitably application exercises like role-plays, team projects and various problem-solving activities. The archetype programs of this genre lasted three to five days, were often residential in a conference centre, and involved 360° survey feedback, high level executive chats and time for personal reflection, soul-searching and privately “leveling” with colleagues who needed leveling with.

As the market for leadership development programs matured, designers responded to clients’ needs for something different. After all, managers in development-oriented corporations found themselves going to two or three workshops a year; the same or similar learning methods were dished up whether the topic was corporate change, influence, negotiation, leadership or even sales and sales management. Clearly, variety became a design criterion.

Soon, the market embraced imaginative experiential simulations where participants had to figure out how to cross rivers filled with “crocodiles” drawn on a meeting room floor armed with flipchart paper and masking tape. Zero sum games, blindfold walks, imaginary factories making paper airplanes or distributing beer are all mixed in with time to think about management and leadership behaviors. Participants learned to coach each other on how to juggle, music teachers taught classes of executives how to play the violin, and people watched movie clips and related scenes to leadership practices. Outside the classroom, participants went on ropes courses, rock climbing, camping and sailing experiences in an effort to make a “real” learning experience. Mild discomfort, the illusion of danger, a level playing field, and forced dependency all contributed to a bonding experience. The more skilled the facilitator, the more participants were able to extract a learning message from these activities. In the 1990s and continuing today, another trend emerged in the management development world.

The three to five-day program largely moved out of favor; training for executives had to be special—and short—for them to invest their scarce time. To compete for the attention of technology-savvy younger managers, the experience also had to be entertaining. Authors and speakers with unique theories were hired to run workshops. Celebrity professors from business schools were asked to lecture on the latest thinking and lead a case discussion on a topic of interest. Philosophers taught the Classics to CEOs and their teams; English professors wrung management theory out of Shakespeare. All of these had in common a remarkable intellectual challenge, an outside perspective and expertise, and brevity.

However, something seemed to be missing from the latest waves of management and leadership training. To be sure, the concepts, cases, and models were interesting, even compelling, and, despite the raft of experiential exercises, the instructional models were mostly based on discussion and dialogue. Leadership training had evolved into a left-brained exercise—cerebral, analytical, and predictable.

If history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten.

-Rudyard Kipling
Around the end of the 1990s, a new approach emerged: the historical leadership experience. Momentum for this method started when several retired US military officers rekindled an old military teaching tradition—the Staff Ride—and marketed it to corporations. As we will see, this new approach had design elements—emotion and drama—that corporate audiences had rarely experienced. While many current historical leadership experiences revolve around battlefield visits and military themes, the method is appropriate for a wide variety of venues and topics. An historical event that involves a dramatic, documented story, a cast of visible characters, and a place to visit preferably with actual artifacts can serve as a platform to teach management competencies in a memorable and unique way. The designer of the experience needs to understand the historical story, have insight into the possibilities for linking management concepts to that and create an agenda that takes advantage of the setting and story. The successful implementation of the design then depends on the creativity of a skilled facilitator to draw out the lessons.

What makes the historical leadership lesson different is that participants learn principles that are wrapped around indelible images of characters and events. The staff ride concept is the basic framework for this approach. A historical leadership experience involves bringing students to a historical site, methodically visiting specific locations, retelling the story of the events that took place, and discussing various topics with an instructor. In the military setting, the primary interest is strategy and troop maneuvers, studying terrain and the like. In a corporate setting, the lessons topics can be leadership, influence, change, innovation or whatever the historical story holds at its core.

The staff ride has been around for a long time. In 1906, the assistant commandant of the US Army General Service and Staff School brought students to view Civil War battlefields in Georgia on what was to become the first staff ride. Later, the United States Military Academy formalized these programs; cadets would visit battlefields and discuss elements of the battles. This model became a pro-forma teaching technique for the military. The forward-looking retired officers who repackaged the staff ride selected one of the most dramatic events in North American history—the battle of Gettysburg—as a teaching venue for corporate leaders and entrepreneurs. As we will see, that experience provided some added dimensions to contemporary leadership training—drama, real characters, and the ground itself.
2. AN HISTORICAL LEADERSHIP LESSON

By looking at a specific example of an historical leadership experience created for corporate audiences, we can examine the challenges to instructional design and how they were met. This examination of constraints and approaches is meant to serve as a guideline to others who have an opportunity to pursue this unique instructional model.

This writer became involved with Gettysburg as a leadership development tool when an organization needed help in designing and co-conducting a leadership experience for executives which they would subsequently market. As a design consultant and leadership expert, I would be working with a retired US Army Colonel and former military history professor from the US Military Academy at West Point who knew the story and all the characters to a high level of detail. That this would be a significant design challenge became clear when we made an inventory of the conditions we would be facing:

2.1 The Gettysburg Story

In the American Civil War, the battle of Gettysburg represented the culminating moment in a chain of events intended, by the Confederate leadership, to force US President Abraham Lincoln to accept a negotiated settlement or to encourage the British to support the South. The challenge was embedded in a truly complex story; a participant needed a contextual understanding of the causes of the war, progress of the war to July 1, 1863, Confederate General Robert E. Lee’s strategy, the many characters involved and much more. There was additional useful information about the military technology of the time, how armies were organized, what their methods were, and other background information that would allow the participant to better grasp and envision the events they were about to vicariously relive. The challenge was to get participants up to speed on this background without overburdening them.

Even when participants were oriented to the historical events that led up to the incidents to be discussed, literally everyone knew the outcome of the historical story beforehand. The Confederates were defeated; Pickett’s Charge was a gallant attempt which failed; Col. Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain’s regiment from Maine bravely held the end of the Union left flank at Little Round Top. The question was how the designers could create suspense under these conditions.

2.2 The Terrain, Location & Weather

A historical leadership lesson takes place at the venue where events occurred. At Gettysburg, that meant on the ground at the National Military Park in Gettysburg, PA. The park itself is 20 square miles with 26 miles of public and parkland roads transiting the site. Walking to the various sites required traversing muddy fields, stonewalls, climbing steep hills, dealing with rain and occasionally very hot weather. In addition, we would have to do most of our discussions standing up; there are no benches nor places for repose. And, as we would be on the ground for several hours at a time, there was a need to be near rest room facilities that were, in fact, available but not necessarily easy to get to.

In addition, Gettysburg is remote even today. It is at least two hours from major airports in Baltimore and Washington, D.C. The experience could not be a half-day or a single day. The Leadership experience would require participants to invest two days and another for travel. So, the pressure for creating a valuable use of time for busy executives is magnified.

2.3 The Crowds

Gettysburg attracts two million visitors a year. These include tourists, families, school groups, other youth groups, veterans and organized tours of all sizes. Professional and licensed Gettysburg tour guides conduct many of these tours. In addition, there are yearly reenactments conducted by dedicated enthusiasts who represent both Union and Confederate forces. The challenge is that there can potentially be many people arriving at a specific site at the same time as the leadership class. This raises questions about how to conduct meaningful discussions in the midst of other people milling...
around, some being lectured to by tour guides, other posing for pictures, etc. The stories of what individuals did and the choices they had are both dramatic and poignant. Creating that mood in a public setting would be difficult.

3. IN SEARCH OF A LEADERSHIP MODEL
There was a question of what leadership model to teach. Was it the Jim Collins, *Good to Great* construct, or Noel Tichy’s, *Leadership Engine*? Would we look to Warren Bennis, Peter Drucker or Ram Charan? Was it a question of practical leadership lessons like those of Captain Michael Abrashoff’s *It’s Your Ship*, or do we embrace Tom Peters’ provocative views? When looking at mind the best asset we had: an incredibly dramatic story with many subplots and personalities and the ground itself where the events took place.

4. HOW WE APPROACHED THE DESIGN CHALLENGE
Our first decision was to closely examine the history and learn what happened—what preceded and followed the event. We read Michael Shaara’s *Killer Angels*, a historical novel noted for a high degree of scholarly accuracy, Shelby Foote’s *Stars In Their Courses*, a closely written description of the campaign, the classic study of character, *Lee’s Lieutenants*, by Douglas Southall Freeman and historian James M. McPherson’s *Hallowed Ground*.

*Probably the greatest challenge of all was creating the link between what was discussed in the leadership experience and what participants could take away as practical lessons for their own practice of leadership.*
5. LEADERSHIP MOMENTS: THE STORIES

The leadership moments formed the thread of the series of stories we would tell our participants and which contained potential lessons that could link to current day leadership dilemmas. The first was John Buford’s decision to forestall the Confederate advance on the morning of July 1. We talked about Buford’s experience as an Indian fighter, the rapid fire carbines of his troops, the advantages he created by using a particular formation called a defense in depth. Another was Lee’s decision to engage the Army of the Potomac after the action had already started through a chance encounter without knowing what he was facing due to the absence of intelligence from his missing scout, General Jeb Stuart and his cavalry. In another situation, with the first afternoon of the battle moving to the Confederate’s advantage, Lee saw an opportunity to take Cemetery Hill, giving General Richard Ewell a vague command to take the ground “if practicable.” Ewell’s subsequent hesitation cost the Confederates their advantage, and his caution in deciding not to move against the hill is debated today as a turning point in not only the battle, but in American history. Some historians posit that if Ewell had taken the high ground that afternoon, the entire war—and American history—might have turned out completely differently.

We also viewed Union General Dan Sickle’s autonomous decision on Day Two of the battle to move his troops to what he felt was a better defensive position at the Peach Orchard—contrary to General George Meade’s orders—as an interesting interpretation of initiative. Sickle’s flamboyant personality, non-military background, and scandalous past—he shot his wife’s lover and was the first person in the US to use the insanity defense—had all the elements of a rich discussion on how creative energy could be managed and the role of discipline in modern organizations. The story of the 20th Maine Regiment and Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain at Little Round Top was an example of perseverance and ingenuity in the face of overwhelming obstacles. The ongoing and unsettling conflict between Lee and his main lieutenant, General James Longstreet, who opposed the idea of an offensive strategy from the beginning of the campaign, sets up a classic leadership challenge of getting people to buy into a plan and execute against it. Finally, we included Abraham Lincoln’s vision of a nation and what the conflict meant to him.

These leadership moments all had a sense of high drama and tension. When individual stories were told, they unraveled details of what actually happened. They made for rich discussion and debate of the choices the leaders faced, pointed to the complexity of decisions, revealed the absence of easy answers and pointed to the urgency of difficult moments. These are exactly the kinds of issues business leaders face today.

A leadership model would provide a unifying lens, so to speak, so that we could understand these long-ago leadership moments in context and relate them to current challenges.

5.1 The Divergence Seduction of Many Stories

One of the challenges we faced in designing this experience was identifying a leadership model to relate all these stories to. The stories were many and rich; they could seduce us into a divergence mode. A leadership model would provide a unifying lens, so to speak, so that we could understand these long-ago leadership moments in context and relate them to current challenges. Taken individually, for example, each leadership moment we identified represented an individual’s encounter with leadership principles—positive or negative examples of some aspect of leadership behavior. Ewell’s over-analysis of the situation at Cemetery Hill could be taken as an example of having to be highly certain before deciding; Lee’s laissez-faire attitude of planning—delegating details to his officers—represents setting an
organizational climate where low clarity can have a devastating impact. Chamberlain’s ingenuity and courage represent what we expect every leader to demonstrate—emotional commitment and dedication. But, what was the thread, the construct, the set of principles or behaviors that held all these disparate principles together? What we needed was a model that put the leadership concept together and described what leaders did. It had to be simple, behavioral and, most importantly, useful.

5.2 The Convergence Challenge of Too Many Leadership Models After reviewing leadership models from many well-known sources, it became clear to us that one model would not fit our needs. While elements of Jim Collins’ Good To Great, for instance, were relevant to our stories, we didn’t want our experience to be simply a lesson in applying that model. Told that way, Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia had a clear “hedge-hog”—the Army could move fast, but it lacked discipline of execution without its key missing leader “on the bus”, Stonewall Jackson, who was killed before the battle.

6. EMERGENCE OF A HYBRID LEADERSHIP MODEL

Instead of reflecting a specific construct like Good To Great, we elected to create our own. The source of this Leadership Lens, as we called it, would be our knowledge of leadership behavior as we knew it from our consulting and research and the characters and their stories. The Leadership Lens we synthesized is a simple three-part model.

6.1 Create The Fundamental Idea A leader’s role is to scan the environment, learn the “ground”, recognize opportunities, and from that, create a focused direction. The implication goes beyond the idea of a vision statement; a leader is the source of the vision, the set of eyes that is always looking for opportunities. Once that vision is clear in the leader’s mind, it has to be formulated in a way that others can see it as well. While this is a relatively simple concept, we felt it was a reflection of all the leaders we have studied and certainly was reflected for better or worse by the cast of characters at Gettysburg. Robert E. Lee, for example, viewed the invasion of the North as a key strategic move to bring about an armistice. While his lieutenants knew his vision, they weren’t totally clear on how this was going to be carried out, creating the root cause for the conflict between General James Longstreet, the second in command, and Lee.

6.2 Set and Impose Operating Values, Practices, Principles A leader is the tone-setter and rule-maker of an organization. As we know from organizational climate research, management creates a feeling of what it is like to work in the organization based on the rules and practices the leader puts in place. This feeling of climate is a key to motivation. The leader figuratively puts the operating manual of the organization in place or changes what is already there to something more in line with his or her beliefs and values. We view this as a conscious imposition by the leader. M. Morrell and S. Capparell’s study of Antarctic explorer Ernest Shackleton, Shackleton’s Way, depicts a leader who created a work environment where all crew members, regardless of role, had to perform menial tasks and, at the same time, were expected to be positive, cheerful and cooperative with each other. At Gettysburg, we learn that Union commander General George Meade was appointed to his role two days before the battle, having no time to create an operating climate of his own other than the usual military discipline. This gap can be viewed as contributing to his subordinate Dan Sickles’ feeling free to take independent action which led to confusion and potential ruin on Day Two of the battle. To this day, new managers are tested by direct reports who soon learn that strong leaders set up clear boundaries and expectations for performance.

6.3 Demonstrate An Emotional Edge Every leader creates an emotional reaction in his or her followers, based on the level of commitment and dedication he or she overtly displays. The leader can demonstrate high moral values, boundless energy, steady and calm resolve, affection for employees or
courage; there isn’t a right way to demonstrate an emotional edge. What counts is how the leader shows up as a person, exposing his or her commitment, beliefs and energy. When a leader captures his or her employee’s attention and respect, their motivation will follow. Lee was regarded with great affection by his troops. Even in defeat, Robert E. Lee was highly respected by both sides. The idea of emotional edge is completely subjective; it is one of those factors that you know when you see it. Buford’s resolve at McPherson’s Ridge, Chamberlain’s courage on Little Round Top and other examples all have modern equivalents in corporate and civic leadership.

Who could not feel moved by Rudi Guiliani’s sense of command and compassion on September 11? Who could not feel impressed and excited by Steve Jobs’ announcement of another innovation? Of course, a prime example of emotional edge is Lincoln’s speech at the Gettysburg battlefield. The humility and respect he paid to those who gave “their last full measure of devotion” and the simple resolution that they “have not died in vain” and that the government of, by and for the people “shall not perish from this earth” shows what courage can be in the face of uncertainty.

These three elements and the more specific behaviors which further describe them, taken together, represent an easy to remember and applied view of leadership. We wanted our model to be “portable” so our participants could carry it around with them in their memories and recall it when we discussed different leadership moments. As we learned, the model became the springboard for discussion; participants were able to critique the character’s leadership moments and relate their own corporate examples using the elements of the model.

7. THE “STORIES” & “MODEL” AS LEADERSHIP TOOLS
With the leadership moments and model in mind, we created a flow of events, linking these together from the beginning of the battle to its calamitous conclusion at Pickett’s Charge.

7.1 The Flow and Timing Our idea was to tell the story of the three-day battle in chronological order. We would start with Buford, move to Lee’s decision, Ewell’s uncertainty, ending Day One of the story. Day Two of the battle would cover a discussion about Lee’s conflict with Longstreet, his decision to conduct a coordinated attack, Sickle’s excursion into the Peach Orchard, and the story of Chamberlain on Little Round Top. We would cover Day Three of the battle by revisiting Lee’s decision to attack the middle of the Union line while attempting an end-run.

President Lincoln’s hand written notes of his Gettysburg Address
cavalry attack, how Lee’s management style changed from more or less laissez-faire to highly directive, Longstreet’s reluctance and his choices as a leader, and the consequences of Pickett’s Charge. The final lesson would take place at the Gettysburg cemetery where Lincoln made his famous address.

Each “Day” of the battle would require at least a half day of instruction and would visit at least three different locations. We would begin early, head by bus to each venue, pause for lunch and continue. A chase car driven by a staff member would accommodate the need for people to take a break. We selected locations that were off the beaten track, for the most part, or we visited them when crowds were minimal. For example, the group found itself quite alone on Little Round Top at the end of our first day of the experience.

We had a debrief session after our day on the battlefield in a classroom like setting at our hotel. The discussion involved comparing what happened to incidents participants were familiar with and in extracting key messages and ideas that became illuminated and magnified by the experience.

7.2 Setting the Context Our approach was to tell the story of a series of decisions by a relatively small number of people and discuss these in terms of the leadership model we created. The larger story was now background while our leadership moments became foreground. Our participants needed to understand the historical context and the larger issues being played out by the characters in the story.

Toward that end, we planned to ask our participants to read Michael Shaara’s Killer Angels prior to coming to the leadership experience. Knowing that some participants might not read the entire novel, we also provided them with a short historical synopsis of the origins of the Civil War and the history of the battle of Gettysburg. In our opening introductory session, our military historian-facilitator planned a concise lecture description of the how the war was going just prior to Lee’s decision to invade the North. Finally, we found that the bus chartered for the experience had audio-visual capabilities, allowing us to use scenes from the movie, Gettysburg, to orient our participants before arriving at a location as well as reviewing significant incidents after we left a location. We felt we could craft these elements into a design that would start with readings, continue with an orientation lecture, and be supported by handouts and movies.

7.3 Making the Link The leadership lens became the key vehicle for linking the program to each participant’s real-world leadership challenge. We used the model to summarize our discussions of the key leadership moments, and we drilled down on them for specific “how-tos” in our debriefing sessions. For example, if participants had stated that motivating staff was an issue for them at work, we would return to that personal learning theme whenever the leadership moment we were discussing was relevant. “What did you learn from Lee’s behavior about how a leader should or shouldn’t motivate his direct reports?” would be a typical summary question. Through discussion of the historical character’s
difficulties and actions, participants were able to appreciate the impact of having a clear, relevant, challenging Fundamental Idea—Vision—can be to direct reports. In debriefing, we would ask participants what the historical characters could have done differently in setting a vision and what some good examples were of corporate leaders who had motivating Fundamental Ideas. From this exchange, the facilitators were able to tease out the characteristics of a strong Fundamental Idea and how it could be used to motivate direct reports. The participants collected these useful thoughts and incorporated them into the learning journals.

That aspect of making the link between the story and real work is a fairly predictable design feature. There were, however, other factors unique to a historical learning experience that made the lessons memorable. The drama of each leader’s story, the very act of standing on the ground where the story took place and the poignancy of the outcomes created a strong emotional reaction in each participant. That reaction cemented the underlying meaning of the leadership principle into place. The image of General Ewell standing at the base of Cemetery Hill, struggling to make a decision, his hesitation, the vague instructions he was given, the fading daylight, the opportunity lost adds a dimension to the concept of analysis paralysis that can’t be conjured up in a classroom discussion. Walking the same mile or so of ground that Pickett’s divisions crossed under heavy fire, taking momentary refuge in the swales, emerging exposed under the Union’s guns imprints a lesson about courage, loyalty, and a leader’s emotional edge in choosing to take a huge risk offers a lesson that is impossible to forget.

Months after the experience at Gettysburg, selected participants were asked to report what they remembered and what they put to work in their practice of leadership. Not surprisingly, their comments most often reflected an image from the battlefield. A typical comment would be, “I will always remember how Chamberlain came up with an idea under intense pressure, communicated it to his troops and pulled it off without panic or confusion. It’s an idea that I access when I feel under the gun.” Bear in mind, we were telling our leadership stories on an empty stage; the actors had gone long ago. What ultimately makes a historical leadership lesson work is the power of place, the stories of real leaders and the imagination of participants.

8. LEADERSHIP LESSONS LEARNED FROM HISTORY

The Gettysburg battle is only one example of a how leadership can be learned from history. We have also conducted brief sessions on board “Old Ironsides”—USS Constitution—in Boston Harbor and have plans for non-military venues. Thomas Edison’s workshop, the site of the first nuclear reaction under the football stadium at the University of Chicago, Lewis and Clark’s fort on the Oregon coast are examples of sites that have potential for this approach.

From working with these settings, it is clear there are some requirements for a successful historical leadership learning experience.

8.1 A Significant, Well-documented Story with Dramatic Events

The historical event has to have a powerful story where momentous decisions were made and far-reaching implications were played out. Like any good story, there has to be drama, conflict, overwhelming odds, emotion and a lot of “what-if” moments. In addition, the story has to be documented, preferably from a number of first-hand sources.

8.2 A Compelling Set of Characters

The story needs to contain main characters and lesser lights who have dimensionality, personality, and depth. When we learn that General Ewell had just returned from convalescent leave and had been married while away from the war, his hesitation at Cemetery Hill takes on another dimension. In preparing this kind of learning activity, the facilitators and designers are obliged to do their homework and dig through the sources for facts that round out the characters.
8.3 An Accessible, Intact Setting  As noted, the site of the leadership lesson is a critical asset. Being in the same exact place where momentous events took place pulls on participants' imagination and helps dissolve time. Granted, not every participant is able to make the imaginative leap or has the sensitivity to see what historical characters can teach them. However, with careful pre-readings, a thoughtful scene-setting presentation, expert facilitation from group leaders who have a flair for story telling, the emotional connection can be made for those who engage the idea.

8.4 Clear Lessons from Decisions, Initiatives, Opportunities  Finally, the story itself has to contain a number of leadership moments where the characters in the historical story are placed in a dilemma, faced huge obstacles or overwhelming odds. The designers of the experience have to be able to show how what happened—for better or worse—reflected valid leadership principles. That implies creating or applying a leadership model that can be used as the learning content of the program. It also suggests that that leadership principle will be meaningful and useful to participants and that they can relate present-day stories to it. Without this framework as a foundation, participants can lose the thread of the lessons being taught.

9. SUMMARY: THE FINAL INGREDIENT  In all candor, an historical leadership experience is not for everyone. These venues can be difficult to reach, physical conditions are not always ideal for walking around, let alone learning, and the onus for making links to current work challenges is squarely on the participant. Despite that, we have found that the best participants are those who have sought out the experience and come voluntarily, are willing to do the pre-readings, engage in discussion and work at conjuring up the past. So, the final ingredient in making a historical leadership learning experience effective is the commitment of the participant. When the combination of right venue, story, leadership model, dedicated facilitators and engaged participants converge, this kind of learning event can have a life-long impact.

10. REFERENCES

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